

INGALLS, MONIQUE M. *SINGING THE CONGREGATION: HOW CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP MUSIC FORMS EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY*. NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2018. 253 PP. \$58.00.

In *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community*, Monique Ingalls examines how contemporary worship music “shapes the activities that evangelicals define as ‘worship’ and how these musically centered performances have brought into being new social constellations [congregations]” (4). Contemporary worship music (CWM) has become both a unifying and divisive device that has fundamentally changed how evangelicals gather both in theory and practice.

Ingalls conducted research between 2003 and 2013 predominantly in the United States and Canada. For Ingalls, CWM is “a contingent social practice that both shapes and reflects the religious collectivities that create, circulate, perform, and critique it” (11). CWM should be understood as a social practice with empirically observable traits. The term “evangelical” does not denote a group that adheres to specific theological beliefs but a “discursive network that is articulated through concrete, embodied practices ... the musical practices within the activity marked as ‘worship’” (17). A group can be considered evangelical by its use of CWM. Lastly, Ingalls expands on the traditional notion of “congregation” to include “any gathering where participants understand the primary activity as being religious worship” (23).

Chapter 1 examines the mode of concert as congregation. Ingalls explains there has always been some overlap between CWM and Contemporary Christian Music (CCM). Since the 1990s many artists that once performed solo acts were now writing and performing songs designed for congregational worship. Ingalls highlights some of the intentional actions performers/worship leaders take to convey they are leading worship and not “performing.” For example, by encouraging people to sing (participate) the congregation sees the event not only as a concert but a worship service—something they and the musicians on stage are actively doing together (56). Lastly, through promise of transformation the “concert space is sacralized” (67). A positive worship experience by an attendee serves to validate and support CWM and the concert mode for congregating.

The second mode, that of conference, is the topic of chapter 2. Heavily influenced by the mode of concert, the conference acts as a pilgrimage

gathering geared toward age-specific groups. Additionally, the conferences engage in what Ingalls calls “eschatological discourse” by attempting to give attendees a glimpse of heaven (79). The primary vehicle for accomplishing this is by using CWM.

In chapter 3, Ingalls examines the mode most often associated in any discussion of congregational song—music in the local church. Specifically, Ingalls surveys music at St. Bartholomew’s Church in Nashville, Tennessee, a mainline Episcopal church.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on CWM in the public square. In chapter 4, Ingalls surveys Toronto’s “March for Jesus” (1992–1999) and “Jesus in the City” (2000s–early 2010s) parades. Although organized by separate entities, both shared a common use of CWM by attempting to “sing the presence of God into their city” (168).

The online mode of congregating is examined in chapter 5. Ingalls examines “live-streamed worship services, user-generated YouTube worship videos, or prerecorded audiovisual materials for use in live worship settings” (172). Technology has allowed and facilitated this entirely new mode of congregating that centers primarily on consumption and participation in CWM. Individuals can now experience a new “type” of community that facilitates a consumer-driven context where worship experiences can be simply subscribed to or purchased through a digital pass.

In her conclusion, Ingalls emphasizes that CWM “makes mundane spaces sacred, transforms a gathering of individuals into a congregation, and brings heaven to earth” (216). What Ingalls calls “shared musical and worship practices” can bring together people with various theological, political, and ideological backgrounds, who otherwise might not associate. Ingalls notes that “congregational music making” should be understood not only within the context of ecclesial institutions because of CWM’s saturation in “individual devotion and various social activities” (217). This saturation demands that any study of congregational music, current or future, must look past hymnals, official church publications, and “local expressions” (218).

Through observations, robust research, and synthesis of concepts from various disciplines, Ingalls confirms her thesis. Additionally, *Singing the Congregation* provides a framework for future study by expanding the traditional view of congregational music studies. CWM justly requires serious musical and theological exploration but should not be confined only to such disciplines. Ingalls presses the case for continued serious

ethnomusicological examination. *Singing the Congregation* is suitable for dedicated, motivated, open-minded readers who are prepared to be confronted by the myriad of ways CWM has permeated and affected one's devotional life and world view.

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